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USAF SECURITY FORCES AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
SKILLS IN THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT: ARE WE  
PREPARED?

by

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## *Preface*

One does not usually think about foreign language ability when describing the skills necessary for the average USAF Security Forces (SF) member. However, considering the wide range of foreign countries SF personnel work in on a daily basis, engaging with the local populace, and with the ability to use deadly force, you wonder why language skills are not a prerequisite for this duty. Two tours in Korea and a six-month tour in Saudi Arabia during Desert Shield/Storm emphasized this point to me.

This paper represents the opportunity for me to explore this issue in greater detail. USAF Security Forces are comprised of dedicated men and women who expertly perform a difficult mission. Their professionalism goes without question. However, it is incumbent upon every SF member to look for ways to improve mission accomplishment and make the job easier for our personnel. This paper is a small step in that direction.

There is not enough space available to acknowledge everyone who provided me assistance in the completion of this paper. However, special thanks goes to my Faculty Research Advisor, Major Edward F. Greer, who provided a great deal of advice and guidance. I would also like to thank my family for their support and patience. They handled my many absences and late nights with humor and understanding. Finally, I would like to recognize the Air Command and Staff College for this opportunity. Without the research program, I am confident many important topics and areas of study would go unexplored.

### *Abstract*

Since the end of the Cold War, the USAF has become a small, CONUS-based expeditionary force. Our missions are increasingly combined in nature, and we depend heavily on Host Nation Security Forces (HNSF) to provide our overseas security. In this environment, foreign language skills are extremely important. However, the USAF SF, without a reliable method to develop and employ these skills, is ill prepared to operate at maximum capability in this new environment.

In the critical mission areas of Force Protection (FP) and Air Base Defense (ABD), SF must rely on Host Nation Security Force Personnel (HNSFP) to provide forces and intelligence. However, the SF must rely on the HNSFP to speak English, hire civilian national translators, or borrow qualified personnel from other USAF units to facilitate communication. Utilizing these methods, the SF commander is not assured of rapid, accurate, and reliable communication with HNSFP.

There are ways to alleviate the problem. The SF should create SF Foreign Area Officers (FAO), and train NCOs as linguists. Also, the SF should include linguists in all deploying SF units, utilizing any qualified military person to fill the position. Also, the SF need to improve the hiring and training of host nation civilian translators, and encourage the assignment of dedicated host nation military personnel to in-place SF.

Without SF action to address this problem, mission accomplishment overseas will become increasingly more difficult and complicated.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The United States Air Force (USAF) Security Forces (SF) have one of the most important and demanding missions in the USAF: providing Force Protection (FP) and Air Base Defense (ABD) to the personnel and resources needed to fly, fight, and win. This job has become exceedingly more difficult in the post-Cold War period as we transition from an overseas-based force to a CONUS-based expeditionary force. To meet the demands of this mission we have acquired a wide-range of technological and organizational force enhancements. However, the SF career field has overlooked a significant capability which could mean the difference between victory and defeat in future conflicts: the ability to rapidly, accurately, and reliably communicate with foreign host nation security forces personnel (HNSFP) in their native language.

My purpose is to discuss this problem by examining the roots of the issue, review the impact on overseas SF operations, analyze how other services and agencies have dealt with this issue, and offer some recommendations to alleviate the problem.

I will first provide a general review of the problem by examining the strategic environment the US military operates in today, and the specific roles the SF perform in this environment. I'll discuss the importance of foreign language skills, and how rapid,

accurate, and reliable communication with HNSFP is essential to the successful accomplishment of the SF mission.

Following this, I'll examine the problem in greater detail by reviewing the various procedures the SF career field uses today to bridge the gap of foreign language communication. I'll also review the efforts of organizations with similar missions to address the problem. This section will draw on historical records, in addition to personal interviews and the author's experiences.

Finally, I'll present recommended actions the SF career field can implement to minimize the impact of foreign language communication problems.

### **Limitations of the Study**

My intent is to offer a brief review of a problem area that exists in the USAF and offer recommendations to alleviate the problem. Due to several factors, I can only present a thumbnail sketch of the central issue. These factors include limited time due to the academic school year, no TDY funding for unit visits, and project length limitations.

### **Methodology**

This paper was developed with information received from the Air University Library, USAF official publications, Internet information, personal interviews, and the author's personal experiences.

### **Definitions**

In an effort to provide a clear understanding of this subject, terms used throughout the paper are defined below:

Security Forces (SF): USAF personnel tasked to provide law enforcement, physical security, force protection, and air base defense services to the USAF.

Host Nation Security Force Personnel (HNSFP): Personnel who provide law enforcement, physical security, force protection, and air base defense services in any country other than the United States. These personnel can be from any active military service, civilian police, National Guard, militia, or other paramilitary organization.

Force Protection (FP): Practices, procedures, or activities that directly or indirectly serve to protect USAF personnel.

Air Base Defense (ABD): Practices, procedures, or activities that directly or indirectly serve to protect USAF installations and resources.

Civilian National Translator: A host nation civilian who are recruited to serve as a translator.

## **Summary**

The problem of foreign language communication is not new. However, the ever changing strategic environment and the changing state of the US military have served to highlight this problem. To grasp the significance of the problem, I'll now offer a discussion of these two factors and describe the roles and missions of the SF.

## Chapter 2

# The Impact of Foreign Language Communication on Military Operations

*Fluency in the local language leads to an understanding of the culture in which the language is embedded. Without the capability to operate in a given culture, a unit or an individual will, at best, realize only limited success. At worst, an operational unit will find itself alienated from its environment.*

-Kurt E. Muller

*On the Military Significance of Language Competence*

The focus of my study is how foreign language communication affects the USAF security forces. However, the roots of this problem are much deeper than one career field; indeed, it affects the entire military. A brief review of the larger issue is appropriate prior to narrowing the focus on the SF.

The military of today has changed dramatically from where it was 15 years ago. In response to the bi-polar superpower world that evolved after WWII, the United States constructed a vast overseas base infrastructure focusing on Western Europe, the Republic of Korea, and Japan. For the majority of service personnel, assignments overseas were relatively routine and predictable. Bases were large, relatively self-sustaining (personnel could meet their needs through base services), and were supported by large populations of host nation workers who lived in the local area and had developed an ease and familiarity with the English language. Deployments and TDYs to austere locations were

limited, with the focus of getting in and getting out a priority. Generally, military assignments overseas, up until the late 1980's, were relatively benign. However, the great events of world history would change this situation forever.

1989 saw the break-up of the Soviet Union, and a year later, the formation of the coalition that would defeat Iraq in the Gulf War. What was significant about the Gulf War was not the victory, which was militarily predictable, but the new and enduring missions which were spawned: Northern Watch, Southern Watch, and Provide Comfort. The US military found itself enmeshed in missions with limited objectives and no definable end state. Once this threshold was crossed, it became easier to view the military as a heavily armed police force. A new term, Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), entered the military lexicon.

Coupled with this development were the disintegration of the bi-polar world and the creation of the multi-polar world. The US suddenly found itself the only nation strong enough and willing enough to step in and moderate the multitude of ethnic, cultural, and historical conflicts that had been kept in check by the superpower sponsor states. As these tensions boiled over into conflict, the military, operating under the MOOTW concept, became the tool of choice to intervene in these areas. Panama in 1990, Somalia in 1992, Haiti in 1993, and Bosnia in 1994 are a few of the larger examples of MOOTW operations.

The third and final piece to the changing military situation was the dramatic decrease in the number of overseas installations following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1989, we had 38 major installations overseas. In 1991, we had 23. Today, we have 13.<sup>1</sup> The safe, comfortable network of installations we enjoyed in friendly countries is a

shadow of what it used to be. For most servicemen today, duty overseas usually means three or four months in a tent or dilapidated structure, confined to base, and forced to deal with a hostile or dangerous civilian population.

These three factors of the expanding multi-polar world with increased tensions and conflicts, acceptance of MOOTW as a standard military operation, and the massive reduction in our overseas presence, has resulted in the military we have today. It is a CONUS based force, expeditionary in nature, responding around the world to a variety of MOOTW operations.

Current strategic and joint doctrine recognize these facts. The *National Security Strategy* (Oct 1998) states “Smaller-Scale Contingencies . . . will likely pose the most frequent challenge for US forces . . .” Additionally, the *National Military Strategy* (1997) writes “Future challenges to our interests will likely require use of our forces in wide range of concurrent operations short of major theater war.” *Joint Vision 2010* expounds further on this issue: “In addition, we should expect to participate in a broad range of deterrent, conflict prevention, and peacetime activities.”

Along with this change in missions and force structures has come the need for new skills and abilities to operate in the global environment:

Clearly, many of these operations will be in non-English speaking regions and with non-English speaking coalition partners, making a level of global skills mission-essential.<sup>2</sup>

As the Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia missions have shown, this is indeed the case. *JV 2010* further underscores this point: “Further, our history, strategy, and recent experience suggest that we will usually work in concert with our friends and allies in almost all operations.”

Language, then, does become a central issue as we operate in the global environment in small-scale contingencies. However, the US military is ill equipped to meet the need for foreign language specialists. This is reflected in two ways: the way we train and maintain foreign-language specialists, and the way they are utilized.

The conclusion that US military language training is substandard is supported by numerous official sources. A 1990 GAO report found that defense language programs “did not adequately accomplish their objective in training participants to be proficient in languages.”<sup>3</sup> A 1991 AF IG report stated that “language training and proficiency maintenance methods were not satisfying Air Force requirements for language capability.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a 1994 GAO report stated that “the Air Force does not have a Command Language Program.”<sup>5</sup> Finally, the National Security and International Affairs Division of the General Accounting Office (Dec 1994), found that about one third of Defense Language Institute graduates have not attained the minimum language proficiency of level 2 (on a one to five scale, with 5 being the highest).<sup>6</sup>

The manner in which the military does manage its scarce foreign-language qualified personnel also leaves us ill prepared for operating in the global environment. This conclusion is summed up in the following extract:

Our unfortunate experience has been that foreign language capability in the American armed forces has been restricted primarily to only one sphere of military activity . . . foreign language competence is pigeon-holed into the category of military intelligence . . . “<sup>7</sup>

This conclusion is reinforced by a review of current foreign-language specialist breakouts in the USAF. The Intelligence career field (AFSC 14N) has 3.8% of USAF officers, but has 13.4% of USAF foreign language qualified officers.<sup>8</sup> The other 86.6% of foreign language qualified officers are scattered throughout the other 130 USAF career fields.<sup>9</sup>

This is not to belittle the need for language specialists in the intelligence field. Instead, it demonstrates the disproportionate distribution of USAF language specialists.

The conclusion is that the US military has embarked on a strategy of global engagement, in which it is assumed that we will be doing peace-related MOOTW operations. However, we are unprepared to communicate with our friends and allies in the host nation language, and instead will rely on foreign nationals who speak English. What then, is the impact on the USAF Security Forces? How does this situation affect mission accomplishment? To fully understand the impact, a brief review of SF mission responsibilities is in order

### **SF Roles and Missions**

Security Forces are currently performing, and will continue to execute, two major missions in support of the strategy of global engagement: Force Protection and Air Base Defense. In each mission, the participation of Host Nation Security Force Personnel and our ability to rapidly, accurately, and reliably communicate with them is absolutely critical to mission success.

The purpose of the USAF FP Program is to deter or blunt terrorist acts against the USAF by giving guidance on collecting and disseminating timely threat information, creating awareness programs, allocating funds and personnel, and implementing defensive measures.<sup>10</sup> While the program seeks to protect USAF personnel from any type of occurrence that would cause loss of life, such as a natural disaster, this paper will focus on the anti-terrorism nature of the program.

Security Forces are most active in the last component of the FP program, implementing defensive measures. In this capacity at a CONUS installation, SF control



entry to the installation, provide roving patrols to deter hostile action, and dispatch response forces to contain any type of overt attack. The success of the program is based on rapid, accurate, and reliable communication of threat information to the SF. Threat information is provided to the SF through the Air Force Office of Special Investigation (AFOSI), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and local police agencies. This process is relatively efficient, due to excellent communications equipment, and the fact that we *speak the same language*. Any patrolman or desk sergeant can receive a threat notification and place the base in a state of alert.

Force Protection at overseas bases is much more complicated. As in the CONUS, the success of the program is determined by the communication of threat information, usually provided by the AFOSI. However, due to language differences, there is little or no reliable communication between the SF and host nation personnel that share security responsibilities for the installations. At many of our installations overseas, HNSFP share entry control duties with the SF. Also, there is no routine communication between local police and intelligence agencies and the SF, all due to language. Unless HNSFP have personnel who are proficient in English, communication becomes a laborious process conducted through civilian national translators. This problem not only applies to day-to-day communication, but also to the planning and coordination process.

The second primary mission of SF is Air Base Defense. Force Protection is primarily concerned with the protection of military personnel. Air Base Defense is focused on protecting the installation and all warfighting resources, usually during wartime or during contingency operations at overseas locations. The purpose of SF in ABD is to “maintain a secure environment by detecting and engaging enemy forces that

threaten sustained air operations.”<sup>11</sup> This is accomplished by using additional SF and base augmentation forces to maintain a secure perimeter around the installation, protect critical nodes internal to the base, and maintain response forces to defeat any hostile force which penetrates the base perimeter.

Air Base Defense is dependent upon HNSFP to be successful. At overseas installations, SF are usually responsible for guarding the base perimeter, to include a small tactical perimeter immediately outside the actual base boundary. HNSFP are responsible for guarding everything else outside the base. This is a critical area, since it contains the firing zones for hostile standoff munitions and Man Portable Air Defense Systems. A 1995 Rand Corporation study found that 75% of 645 attacks against air bases since World War II were standoff attacks.<sup>12</sup> Without HNSFP, USAF forces can not secure this area.

Of equal importance is the role HNSFP play in securing the interior of the installation. Many of our installations overseas are dual-use with the host nation, and their compounds and operational areas are their responsibility to protect. At Osan AB, Republic of Korea security forces are even responsible for securing a portion of the base perimeter. As a result, the SF commander is forced to rely on HNSFP for a significant part of the base defense mission.

Once again, rapid, accurate, and reliable communications between the SF and HNSFP becomes the key to executing a successful combined operation. However, as described in the FP section, the SF commander is forced to rely on English speaking HNSFP, or civilian national translators, who often have limited English speaking abilities and may not be trained in military terminology.

However, the problem is even greater than described here. The above FP and ABD mission descriptions are based on operations at established installations in allied countries friendly to the US. As discussed early in the chapter, MOOTW in countries with little or no history of friendly relations with the US have become a regular part of the strategy of Global Engagement. The SF commander could find his forces engaged in FP/ABD operations without the benefit of any HNSFP, or have them actively hostile to his efforts. He may have to rely on civilian national translators without knowing their backgrounds or motivations. He and his troops may be the sole US forces that have any contact with the host nation populace, on which he will depend for information and intelligence of hostile action. The SF commander will have state of the art satellite communications equipment to contact any place in the world. Without a reliable translator, however, he may be unable to talk to the people next door. This problem appears to be a fundamental flaw in the way the SF are conducting operations overseas, and bears further scrutiny.

## **Summary**

I have traced the evolution of US military strategy from that of a bi-polar, major theater war world to a multi-polar, MOOTW world. I then demonstrated how capability in foreign languages will be essential to successful mission accomplishment in the multi-polar MOOTW environment. Following this discussion, I focused on the primary USAF SF missions of FP and ABD, and how these mission are dependent on rapid, accurate, and reliable communications with HNSFP. I concluded with the assertion that SF are deficient in their ability to verbally communicate with these personnel, thus complicating mission accomplishment.

This assertion raises the serious issue of a deficiency in SF mission performance. I will now support this assertion by exploring this particular SF problem in depth, as well as examining how other services and agencies are dealing with similar problems.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Headquarters USAF, The Pentagon, Wash., D.C., Plans Division, Installation Plans Branch, 20 Mar 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel Gunther A. Mueller and Lt Col Carl Daubach, "Global Skills: Vital Components of Global Engagement," *Airpower Journal* XII, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 68.

<sup>3</sup> Mueller and Daubach, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Major Darrell W. Bott, "Maintaining Language Proficiency," *Military Intelligence* 21, no. 4 (Oct-Dec 1995): 13.

<sup>7</sup> Kurt E. Muller, "On the Military Significance of Language Competence," *Modern Language Journal* 65, (Winter 1981): 362.

<sup>8</sup> Headquarters Air Education and Training Command, Randolph AFB, TX, Directorate of Personnel, Plans Branch, Analysis Section, 12 Feb 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 31-210, *The Air Force Antiterrorism Program*, 1 July 1997, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 31-301, *Air Base Defense*, 1 Aug 1996, 4.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Shlapak and Alan Vick, "*Check Six Begins on the Ground: Responding to the Evolving Ground Threat to U.S. Air Force Bases* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995), 34.

## **Chapter 3**

### **USAF Security Forces and Foreign Language Skills: Problems and Issues**

By detailing existing national, military, and USAF doctrine, I have demonstrated that foreign language capabilities are important skills to have in the global environment. I have also made the assertion that USAF SF are hampered in their ability to accomplish the missions of FP and ABD because they lack the necessary language skills. A detailed analysis of this assertion will be provided by presenting a detailed review of how SF working overseas are trying to cope with this lack of capability, and the impact this has on the mission. Additionally, I will examine US Army and AFOSI operations, and discuss their approach to the foreign language communication problem.

#### **Current SF Foreign Language Communication Procedures**

SF units stationed or deployed overseas are acutely aware of the problems associated with the language barrier and its impact on operations. The problem varies in severity from country to country, based on several factors. Security Forces working in Western Europe, where significant portions of the population have some English language capability, have a far easier task than SF stationed in Korea or Southwest Asia. Over time, procedures have been developed to try and bridge the language gap. I'll examine these procedures, and outline the limiting factors associated with each procedure.

### **English Speaking HNSFP.**

Undoubtedly, this method is by far the procedure most SF depend on while overseas. As described earlier, SF depend on host nation security forces as an integral part of the mission. When HNSFP speak English, coordination, planning, and execution become much easier. In allied countries or countries that have advanced public education systems, finding this ability in the HNSF is not uncommon.

However, there are limitations with depending on HNSFP to speak English. First, it is unpredictable as to whether or not English speaking officers will be at your duty location, or if their speaking ability will be sufficient to communicate comprehensively. Secondly, the HNSFP may be hostile (as in Operation Just Cause in Panama) or non-existent (as in UNESCOM II in Somalia). Also, it is almost exclusively the officer corps that possesses English language fluency, making it difficult in many cultures for US enlisted personnel to deal with the English-speaking officers.

Even the best scenario dealing with English speaking HNSFP is difficult. It is certainly valuable for planning and coordination, but is of limited value in tactical situations. Since the English-speaking HNSFP do not work for the SF commander, they cannot be directed to where they are needed most. Additionally, HNSFP have no or extremely limited access to US classified materiel. As a result, the information that can be shared with them is limited.

Working with English-speaking HNSFP is highlighted by my experience at Riyadh Air Base during Operation Desert Storm in February 1991. There was only one officer who spoke English in the Saudi security force organization, and no Arabic speakers on the US SF side. One day, after hearing shots fired in the vicinity of the Saudi main gate, the entire US compound went into alert and remained on alert status for three hours,

because we were unable to contact the English-speaking officer. It was only after he contacted us did we learn that the incident had only been a weapon malfunction. Without the ability to speak Arabic, or have access to an Arabic-English speaker, we were tactically blind.

I do not intend to demean the valuable service of English-speaking HNSFP around the world who ably assist SF operations. When these personnel are available, the probability of mission accomplishment goes up. However, the predictability of availability varies, and cannot be used as a planning factor.

#### **Civilian National Translators.**

The use of civilian national civilian translators is the preferred method of communication with HNSFP at established US installations in friendly or allied nations. These personnel have reached some level of fluency in English, and are used to facilitate contact between the SF, HNSFP, and civilians. There are several advantages to using these personnel. As US employees, they work for the SF commander. They have normally been in the local area many years and have a valuable network of friends and contacts. Also, they can be trained in specific areas at the discretion of the SF commander. Most importantly, they can receive a background investigation and be cleared to handle certain types of classified material.

There are also disadvantages in using these personnel. As civilians, they may not have had any military training, and may not be familiar with military terminology, concepts, or thinking. Also, there is a significant dollar figure that goes along with hiring a foreign national. As a civilian, the translator must be paid overtime for weekends, nights, and holidays, precisely the time when language skills may be needed the most.

Also, as a civilian, there is no guarantee that the individual will show for work during hostilities or crisis. There is also the sensitive issue of loyalty. The civilian national translator is still a citizen of the host nation, and can be expected to place his first loyalty to his nation. Once again, these conclusions are not meant to cast aspersions on the many fine civilian nationals who support SF operations around the world. Instead, as stated above, it is merely intended to demonstrate the vulnerable position of the SF commander in a foreign country.

#### **Foreign Language Qualified US Military or Civilian Personnel.**

Whenever possible, the best solution for the SF is to use US military or civilian military foreign language qualified personnel to perform translator duties. The problems inherent to using host nation personnel are absent in this category. When assigned to the SF, they can be used at the commander's discretion. They can be cleared for access to any level of US classified. Also, as US citizens, their loyalty to the US can go unquestioned until proven otherwise. When using military personnel, they can be counted on to perform their mission under hazardous conditions. However, the use of US civilians to serve as linguists is unusual. When the SF use other US personnel as linguists, they come from the intelligence community, the US embassy or mission, and language capable SF personnel.

**Intelligence.** These personnel constitute the majority of US linguists utilized by the SF. Depending on availability, the intelligence community has loaned personnel to the SF for short durations. The majority of these personnel performed well, and were significant contributors to the SF mission. Despite these successes, there are several limitations to using intelligence personnel. First, they are only available when the



owning commander releases them. This creates an unpredictable planning factor for SF deployments. Secondly, many linguists in the intelligence field are trained to understand, and not speak, their target language, lowering their usefulness as a translator. Third, intelligence linguists are trained in a narrow field of target languages, which may or may not be useful to the SF commander. In summary, intelligence linguists are an invaluable tool when they are available and speak the language required for the mission.

**Department of State (DOS).** When available, DOS personnel are an invaluable asset to the SF mission. Most embassies and missions have US personnel who are proficient in the local language, familiar with the culture, and know the local network to get information. However, DOS personnel usually restrict themselves to higher level planning and coordination issues, and do not take an active part in setting up and maintaining an ABD or FP infrastructure. Also, as is common to each category, these personnel do not work for the SF commander, and he cannot depend on the embassy to provide linguistic support on demand, especially in a tactical situation. When the SF mission and DOS mission coincide, the embassy will provide outstanding support, but once again, it is an unpredictable planning factor for the commander.

**SF Organic.** One of the most useful assets the SF commander can have overseas is a SF member fluent in the local language and can serve as a translator. This person combines all the advantages from the previously mentioned categories of linguists, with only minor disadvantages. The most important advantages are ownership by the SF commander, presence during hostile/tactical situations, and specialized training in SF missions and operations. Additionally, a language-qualified SF member is a direct contributor to the SF mission when not engaged in his linguistic capacity.

The disadvantages with using these personnel are slight. The vast majority of these personnel are enlisted, which presents a potential problem in some cultures where HNSF officers prefer to deal with other officers. Also, as has happened on at least one occasion, the SF linguist did such a good job he was taken by the detachment commander to perform command level duties, thus depriving the SF commander of both a linguist and a “gun-toter.”<sup>1</sup>

The practice of utilizing foreign-language qualified SF personnel as linguists to support SF operations has been extensively used by 12th Air Force (12 AF) at Ground Based Radar (GBR) sites in South America. The GBR sites are at locations deep in the jungles of countries supporting counter-drug operations. A four to thirteen person SF unit is detailed on a rotational basis to provide security for each site.<sup>2</sup>

It is 12 AF policy to ensure each SF squad has one member who is fluent in Spanish, as well as trying to man 12 AF/SF office with a Spanish language qualified person to conduct planning and coordination. Despite the dangerous conditions each GBR site operates in, they have yet to lose a single individual to hostile action. This enviable success record has been directly credited to the presence of the Spanish linguist on each squad. This person has ensured that rapid, accurate, and reliable communication between the SF commander and HNSFP is maintained. In one situation, shots were fired on the site perimeter. The SF squad, and all site personnel, immediately went on alert. The SF linguist made immediate contact with the HNSFP, who clarified the incident as a drunken farmer taking potshots at a tree. This is a minor incident, but as the HNSFP had no English speakers on duty that night, the entire site might have been at arms all night, with valuable work time lost, if not for the presence of the SF linguist.<sup>3</sup>

## **Summary**

I have presented a detailed review of how SF overseas attempt to deal with the language barrier. Some methods are more successful than others, and some methods work better in some countries. However, the bottomline is that there is no standardized program the overseas SF commander can count on for linguistic support, and no predictable planning factors the CONUS commander can use to plan his deployment.

As stated earlier, this problem is not a SF problem; it is military wide. The next section will examine how two other organizations have dealt with the problem: the US Army (USA) and the Air Force Office of Special Investigation (AFOSI).

### **United States Army**

The USA has long recognized the problem of communication while overseas. Similar to the USAF, a large percentage of the USA foreign language speakers are in the Military Intelligence Mission Occupation Specialty (MOS). However, they have developed additional programs to assist the commander in overcoming the language barrier. Two significant programs are the Foreign Area Officer program and the Republic of Korea-specific Korean Augmenter to the United States Army (KATUSA) program.

#### **Foreign Area Officer (FAO).**

This program allows selected officers the opportunity to become true experts in the language, culture, and strategic climate of a region or specific country. The training to become an FAO is intensive. The applicant is usually a mid-to-senior level captain who first must accomplish language training at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA. Following this, the officer is sent to graduate school to study for a degree

specializing in the region or country they will be assigned to. Upon completion of the degree, the new FAO is sent for a year of in-country training, usually working out of the US embassy or mission.<sup>4</sup>

Upon completion of the in-country training the FAO is sent back to his branch for an assignment, or is given a FAO assignment. The FAO assignment could be in an embassy, serving as a Defense Attaché or Security Assistance Officer. Other FAO assignments could include: Service, Joint, or Unified Command staff regional analyst, on-site inspection team member, or as a commander's special staff member during contingencies or deployments. Normally, FAOs do not work below the division level during unit assignments.<sup>5</sup>

At first glance, one would question the inclusion of this strategic and operational level program in a paper focusing on tactical level problems. The value of examining this program is that it represents a capability the USAF does not yet have: a ready pool of culturally and linguistically tuned officers to assist commanders operating in the global environment. While not a tactical level program, the principles the program is based upon can be applied to all levels of conflict and MOOTW. This fact alone makes it a "must study" area for any serious planner working in the global environment. I'll now examine a different USA program that is unit-based and operates on the tactical level.

## **KATUSA**

This program was established during the Korean War to beef up under-manned US units with Korean soldiers. Each squad or platoon received several Republic of Korea (ROK) soldiers, and integrated them into the unit as participating members. These soldiers were issued US uniforms and weapons, and could only be distinguished from US

soldier by their nationality and ROK rank insignia. These soldiers quickly learned basic English, and soon began serving as the unit commander's interpreters in the field. When the Armistice was signed in 1953, the USA formalized the program, and has continued it to this present day.<sup>6</sup>

Today, KATUSAs are ROK Army personnel who are selected to serve their mandatory three-year National Service with the US Army. Competition for KATUSA billets is fierce; applicants are chosen by their score on an English language exam administered during ROK Army basic training. Once chosen, they are sent for additional training at the KATUSA school, and then proceed to their USA unit. All US Army Korea units have an allotment of KATUSAs, although the majority of them serve in combat and combat support units.

In a country such as Korea, where the language and culture are relatively inaccessible to westerners, the KATUSA program is highly effective. At the command level, the commander has competent linguists under his command, available wherever and whenever he requires. At the tactical level, the small unit leader can confidently work with a ROK unit, knowing he has the ability to communicate with them rapidly and accurately during a hostile situation.

As stated earlier there are limitations, such as loyalty and competency, when using host nation personnel for translation duties. The KATUSA program is not immune to those limitations. However, in a mature theater such as Korea, the shared security interest and long association between KATUSA soldiers and their US units mitigate these limitations. One drawback is that the program is only possible through the continued support of the ROK government. The USA, while realizing the benefits of the program,

would be unable to fund a comparable program if the KATUSA program was halted. However, the USA has profited greatly from this program, and it can serve as a model program to other countries where the US has a long-term presence.

## **AFOSI**

The AFOSI mission is to investigate criminal activity in the Air Force, and provide tactical ground intelligence to the installation commander in wartime or contingencies.<sup>7</sup> Similar to the SF, AFOSI personnel need considerable coordination and combined operations with HNSFP and the local populace to accomplish their mission overseas. However, the AFOSI has developed two programs to limit their reliance on English speaking HNSFP or hired linguists. These efforts are the Foreign Area Officer program and the linguist program.

### **Foreign Area Officers.**

This program is remarkably similar to the USA FAO program. Mid-level captains receive a year of language training, and then go on to earn an advanced degree specializing in their country or region. After completion of school, the new FAO proceeds to his next assignment, which will be in the country or region. Very often, FAOs will work at the AFOSI headquarters or region (similar to a MAJCOM) as a planner or analyst.<sup>8</sup>

The AFOSI program differs from the USA program in one significant area. While USA FAOs will rarely be assigned to a tactical unit below the division level, AFOSI FAOs will often be assigned to an AFOSI Detachment at base level. This provides the AFOSI detachment commander a force multiplier that the SF commander can only dream

of. The AFOSI FAO, in addition to his country and cultural knowledge, provides rapid, accurate, and reliable communications to the HNSFP, while remaining under the direct control of the detachment commander.<sup>9</sup>

### **Linguist Program.**

Normally, every AFOSI detachment overseas will have a billet for an FAO. There will also be additional billets for agents trained as linguists. Most of these linguists are NCOs who have been to the Defense Language Institute. While not possessing the specialized academic training of the FAO, these personnel nonetheless provide the detachment commander an additional tool to increase mission effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> He is assured of rapid, accurate, and reliable communication with HNSFP during planning and in the execution of tactical operations.

The AFOSI has long recognized the need for US personnel to have the ability to speak directly to foreign nationals and to communicate freely with HNSFP. The programs they have developed ensure the overseas detachment commander will have a mix of language specialists and country/region experts. As a result, he is able to pursue his mission with one less limiting factor to work around.

## **Summary**

I have shown how the SF attempt to solve their foreign language communications problems. The advantages and disadvantages with using English speaking HNSFP, hired civilian translators, and US military or civilian personnel to provide translation were discussed. While reliance on HNSFP and hired civilian translators is the most prevalent method used, they also can be the most unpredictable for the commander. However,

qualified US military and civilian personnel provides the commander the most stability for planning and mission execution.

I also described programs used by the USA and the AFOSI to address the problem of communication. Each of these well developed programs is geared to decreasing the commander's unpredictable planning factors, and enduring rapid, accurate, and reliable communication with HNSFP and the local population. The SF can undoubtedly learn valuable lessons by studying these programs.

I have examined the background and significance of the problem with foreign language communication, and have examined in detail how this problem affects the USAF SF, and the various methods that have evolved to mitigate problem impact. The issues are serious and complex. However, there are programs and procedures the SF can employ to address foreign language communication. I'll turn now to an in-depth review of these recommended actions.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Major Stanley Contrades, USAF, interviewed by author, 24 Nov 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Major Richard Anderson, USA, interviewed by author, 3 Feb 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Max Hastings, *The Korean War* (New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 239.

<sup>7</sup> Major Dennis J. Gervais, USAF, interviewed by author 4 Feb 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



## **Chapter 4**

### **Recommendations**

The problems with foreign language communication are serious but not insurmountable. The success stories, primarily the SF operations in South America and the USA and AFOSI programs, show us the way to resolving this problem. The recommendations listed here are made with the objective of providing SF commanders with rapid, accurate, and reliable communications with HNSFP. For these purposes, communications will also include planning and coordination between SF and HNSFP.

#### **Recommendation #1: Establish a SF FAO Program.**

The SF need to create a pool of linguistically skilled and culturally aware officers to help meet the need stated in the above paragraph. This can be done by creating a SF FAO program. Much to the USAF's credit, the service has attempted to resurrect the dormant AF FAO program modeled after the USA and AFOSI programs. Qualified officers receive language training, graduate level degrees, and additional country/region specific training. FAOs are required to perform alternating FAO and career field specific assignments.<sup>1</sup> The SF should leverage off this program, and select several officers to receive FAO training. However, the program should be modified so the SF FAO always has a SF assignment, with alternating assignments to the applicable country/region.

The average SF FAO would be selected at the six-year point and complete two to three years of training, depending on the language training requirement. The initial assignment would be in the country/region of expertise, with the follow-on assignment in the CONUS. Thirty three officers are required (15 overseas, 18 in CONUS at any given time), and would be assigned as described by the table below:

**Table 1: Recommended SF FAO Manning**

<u>Country/Region</u>	<u>MOBs</u>	<u>NAF/Component Level</u>
Korea	2	1
Japan	3	1
Germany	2	0
Italy	1	0
Turkey	1	0
Middle East	3	1
Africa	0	2 (CONUS)
South America	0	1 (CONUS)

**(MOB = Main Operating Base, NAF = Numbered Air Force)**

This list is not all inclusive, and requires further study to assess SF needs.

The SF FAO program would provide the SF with a pool of linguistically and culturally competent officers who could interface directly with HNSFP and the native populace. The overriding advantage of this program is these officers are fully trained and qualified SF personnel, and at the unit level, work directly for the SF commander and accomplish missions at his discretion.

The FAO would serve on the commander's staff as the Liaison Officer. He would be responsible for official liaison with the HNSFP, advising the commander on relations with the HNSFP, facilitating HNSF participation in air base defense plans, directing the actions of the civilian national translator, and managing the training and assignment of NCO linguists. In wartime, he would work in the Base Defense Operations Center.

## **Recommendation #2: Establish an NCO Linguist Program**

As advantageous as the SF FAO program would be, it would still not meet the requirement of the SF commander for translators at the tactical level of operations. This requirement would be met through the NCO linguist program. This program entails the SF creating a pool of language qualified NCOs to serve as translators for SF squadrons overseas and for deployments/contingencies. Personnel for this program would be drawn from SF NCO ranks, either by utilizing existing qualified personnel, or through training.

Individual SF units have already attempted to quantify language-qualified personnel, most notably 12 AF/SF's creation of an informal database of SF Spanish language speakers. The SF need to build a comprehensive database of foreign language qualified SF personnel. Once this is accomplished, language training would be provided to additional personnel to round out the total requirement. A basic requirement is recommended in the following table:

**Table 2: Recommended SF NCO Linguist Manning**

<b><u>Country/Region</u></b>	<b><u>MOBs</u></b>	<b><u>COBs</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
Korea	10	16	26
Japan	15	0	15
Germany	10	0	10
Italy	5	0	5
Turkey	5	0	5
Middle East	15	20	35
Africa	0	10	10
South America	0	10	<u>10</u>
			116

**(COB = Collocated/Contingency Operating Base)**

Based on this requirement, 232 NCOs would be needed to maintain the country-CONUS-country assignment rotation. This represents approximately 1% of the total SF

enlisted force. On average, five NCOs would be assigned to an overseas MOB. Four would be assigned to the SF flights in order to meet the day-to-day translation needs of the flight commander. The fifth NCO would be assigned to the FP or ABD office to facilitate day-to-day planning and coordination with the HNSFP. The SF NCO Linguist program offers the same advantages as the FAO program: trained SF linguists working directly for the SF commander.

**Recommendation #3: Assign a Linguist to each QFEBA and QFEBC Unit Type Code**

Each SF Headquarters unit and SF flight should have one billet coded as a linguist. When a unit was tasked to deploy, it would also be assigned an applicable linguist from the CONUS pool of 134 linguists created from implementing recommendations #1 & #2 above. At any given time, 131 linguists would be overseas stationed at USAF MOBs. This leaves 134 personnel assigned in the CONUS available for deployment with one of the above groups. These personnel would perform liaison/translator duties for the commander, or be pooled together to work for the senior SF commander when several units are working together.

**Recommendation #4: Formally Task USAF Agencies to Provide Linguist Support**

Even if the first two recommendations are not implemented, the SF commander's need for linguistic support, especially in a contingency environment, is still acute. In the absence of SF organic linguists, other USAF agencies, especially the intelligence community, should be formally tasked to provide the linguistic support for deploying units. This has been done on a limited scale in the 820th Security Forces Group (820 SFG). The mission of the 820 SFG is to provide FP and ABD support to deploying

USAF units. On one deployment to Kuwait in Feb 1998, the group deployed with an Arabic linguist supplied by the Air Intelligence Agency.<sup>2</sup>

Despite this promising development, there is no official agreement between the intelligence community and SF to provide this support. The SF need to leverage off the criticality of the FP/ABD mission and convince the USAF to direct this support. Until this occurs, intelligence support will be based on availability of personnel and the willingness of the intelligence community to release them.

#### **Recommendation #5: Improve Training for Civilian National Translators**

Utilizing SF or USAF supplied linguists will enable us to reduce the number of, and our reliance on, civilian national translators. However, SF will always utilize some civilian national translators when operating overseas, if only to provide continuity. In order to maximize their usefulness, we need to improve their selection and training.

The author is unaware of any governing document that proscribes the hiring and training of civilian national translators. Instead, it is left to each overseas command to establish these requirements. Often, there are no requirements at all. In the Republic of Korea, job descriptions were published, describing the level and nature of duties, and indicating what fluency of English the applicant needed to demonstrate. However, it was up to the discretion of the hiring authority if the applicant met those job description requirements. Naturally, this led to a situation in USFK where there were no real standards, and the level of English ability varied greatly among civilian workers.

To correct this, the SF should institute rigid testing requirements for translator applicants and maintain these standards. Additionally, all new applicants should be brought to Lackland AFB to attend SF officer technical training. Completion of this

training would provide the new translators with the basics in SF terminology, concepts, and operations. New hires would then complete additional training at home station in conjunction with their jobs.

Rigid adherence to high standards and technical training is a daunting task. However, it is a worthwhile investment in personnel who potentially could become the critical cog in FP/ABD operations, with US lives the price for cutting corners.

#### **Recommendation #6: Establish a KATUSA-style program at MOBs**

The KATUSA program in the ROK has been remarkably successful, and should be a model for the USAF in Korea and all the services in other theaters. KATUSAs, while assigned to KATUSA Headquarters for administration and disciplinary matters, perform as members of the assigned US unit, and receive the same type of training. By introducing this type of program, the SF commander's immediate tactical need for communication would be addressed, and additional manpower would be available.

In Korea, the USA employs approximately 5000 KATUSAs. USAF needs would be much smaller and supportable. Twenty-five specially selected and trained Korean Air Police assigned to each SF squadron would create a tremendous impact. The cultural and communications interface would improve both groups. With these personnel assigned to augment US forces performing FP and ABD tasks, commanders at every level could easily communicate with their ROK counterparts. Combined planning issues, such as linkage of defensive lines, movement through lines, and Identification of Friend/Foe would become manageable.<sup>3</sup>

This type of program would work best in a mature theater, where the US has an established presence, and host nation personnel could operate on a routine schedule. In

this type of theater, it is not unrealistic to request the host nation provide English speaking HNSFP for full-time duty with the SF. This is also in the best interest of the host nation, who have a vested interest in keeping US service personnel safe.

#### **Recommendation #7: Utilize Mechanical Translators**

Regardless of the implementation of any or all of these recommendations, the average SF troop in the field will always need to speak directly to host nation nationals. The US Army is moving in this direction with the MultiLingual Interview System (MIS), a computer translator which recognizes words spoken in English, translates the sentence, and pronounces it aloud in the selected foreign language.<sup>4</sup>

The current prototype can only handle basic questions and responses. The first language tested was Serbo-Croat, and several models of the MIS are currently being tested in Bosnia. If successful, developers foresee more complex models that can handle a wide variety of languages and responses.<sup>5</sup>

This technology represents an important step forward in using technology to solve problems we face today. While a mechanical translator will probably never replace a person who speaks a language, it may put an important force multiplier in the hands of the personnel performing the mission.

### **Summary**

I have provided recommendations that are geared toward providing the SF commander with rapid, accurate, and reliable communication with HNSFP. Recommendations #1 and #2 will provide the SF with a highly trained pool of linguists available to assist both the in-place and deployed commander. Recommendations #3 and

#4 ensure linguists are available where they are needed most: working for the deployed SF commander.

Recommendations #5 and #6 are geared toward in-place SF, recognizing their need for linguists on a continuing basis. Finally, recommendation #7 seeks to identify a possible technological answer to fill a portion of the requirement. While this potential answer is still years from fruition, it behooves the SF to get in on the ground floor of a potentially non-manpower intensive option.

I have presented the general problem of foreign language communication, how it applies specifically to the SF, and provided recommendations for minimizing the impact of the problem. I'll thread all of these ideas and issues together by summarizing the total effort, and offer a few brief conclusions.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 16-109, *USAF Foreign Area Officer Program* June 1998; 2.

<sup>2</sup> Major Donald T. R. Derry, USAF, interviewed by author, 15 Jan 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Major David K. Hazlett, USAF, conversation with author, March 1998.

<sup>4</sup> "US Translator Who Speaks the Language," *Jane's Defense Weekly* 26, no. 2 (10 July 1996): 42.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

My purpose has been to discuss the problem the USAF Security Forces have with foreign language communication. I have done this by explaining the background and significance of the problem, how it affects SF mission accomplishment, and by presenting some recommendations to alleviate the problem. If these ideas generate discussion of the problem in the career field, or even are attempted in an exploratory way, then discussing them here has served its purpose.

The USAF is changing, and the SF will have to change as well if they are to retain their ability to accomplish the mission. Our overseas forces have been dramatically reduced, while the national strategy of global engagement continues to increase commitments made on the US armed forces. The result is a CONUS based expeditionary force, continuously deployed to remote and unusual spots around the world. In this environment, our overseas MOBs take on added significance as staging and logistics depots for these deployments. Coupled with a drawdown in forces and increased targeting of US service personnel by terrorists, the tenets of security and force protection become more important than ever.

However, the USAF SF are not fully equipped to operate in the global environment. The SF lack the necessary linguistic skills to ensure rapid, accurate, and reliable

communication between the SF and HNSFP. The dual missions of FP and ABD are dependent upon the full support of HNSFP to be successful. However, our SF overseas are forced to interact with their counterparts through a series of unstandardized procedures. These include reliance on English speaking HNSFP, host nation civilian translators, borrowed intelligence personnel, DOS personnel, and the occasional language-qualified SF member.

Deploying SF commanders are in even worse shape. They cannot even rely on the methods listed above to communicate in the host country. The Security Forces are still learning the importance of language skills, even with numerous examples of successful language programs in the USA and AFOSI. The USA FAO program provides country/region specialists to senior commanders to aid in decision-making. The ROK KATUSA program places English speaking ROK soldiers at the tactical level, providing the small unit leader a valuable force multiplier. The twin AFOSI programs of Area Specialists and Linguists provide the same type of specialized service to the local and regional AFOSI commander.

The Security Forces can learn from these programs, and tailor programs to meet their needs by implementing the recommendations stated earlier. Creating a SF FAO program and NCO Linguist program will enable the SF to meet its language needs in-house. Even without these programs, they can leverage the language skills found within the SF community, coupled with formally tasked linguist assets from other career fields, and man their deploying units with a linguist. At the MOBs, improvements can be made in the way SF hire and train host nation civilian translators. Of particular interest is

encouraging the formation of KATUSA style programs in the countries where US personnel have a long-term presence.

USAF Security Forces have an enviable record of successful mission accomplishment around the world. What goes unrecorded is the potentially greater success the mission would have achieved if the SF commander was fully in-sync with his HNSFP counterparts, or if the tactical level SF leader could interact routinely and regularly with host nation troops. As it is now, our overseas bases in many countries exist in silent separation from the host nation swirling around them. Until we learn how to better tap into the host nation inside and outside the main gate, the SF will be similar to a boxer who fights with one hand tied behind him: working hard, achieving some results, but never reaching full potential, and the prospect of tragedy always at hand.

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